

The Alexander Thomson Society **NEWSLETTER**

Nº 7 JUNE 1993

THE ALEXANDER THOMSON MEDALLION



Great Western Terrace Visit: 17th June

CASES

HOLMWOOD

AFTER THE PUBLICATION of the last *Newsletter*, the aspiring developer of the grounds of Thomson's finest villa submitted a second planning application. This was for twelve flats and eleven cottages. In our letter of objection to the Director of Planning, we agreed that this application was an improvement on the earlier scheme withdrawn on 11th December, "although that would scarcely be difficult to achieve". The density and scale of the development was reduced while the architects, William G. Tait of Alloa, would seem to have invested in a copy of Ronald McFadzean's book, as an attempt was made to produce a pastiche of Thomson's style. However, we and the many other interested bodies maintained our opposition to any development of the site—which we cannot see is financially viable—in our belief that Holmwood must be transferred to the ownership of the National Trust for Scotland.

We are now happy to report that, at its meeting on 20th April, the Planning Committee turned down the application. This was done in unequivocal terms: "The proposed development would by virtue of its unsympathetic scale, form, layout and design, adversely affect the setting of this Grade A Listed building... would be visually intrusive, detrimental to the setting [of] Holmwood and detract from an appreciation of its design... would result in an unacceptable loss of trees which would adversely affect the setting of the listed building... The proposal is contrary to the Green Belt Land Use Policy in the Consultative Draft of the Newlands, Cathcart and Simshill Local Plan which has been approved by the City Council..." and because "the design and layout of the access roads... is substandard."

Because of the firm stand taken by the Council and the proposal to make the land Green Belt—which we applaud—we would now hope that



Damage to St Vincent Street Church. Photos: Gavin Stamp

both Messrs Carvill and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions will understand the reality of the situation and that the nuns will now negotiate directly with the National Trust. However, a further complication has now arisen in that the solicitors acting for the Sisters are advising that, under the terms of the lease of the primary school, Strathclyde Regional Council are responsible for the repairs to Holmwood itself specified under the Repairs Notice served by the District Council. This invokes the absurd situation of public money being spent to enable a commercial development to become more finan-

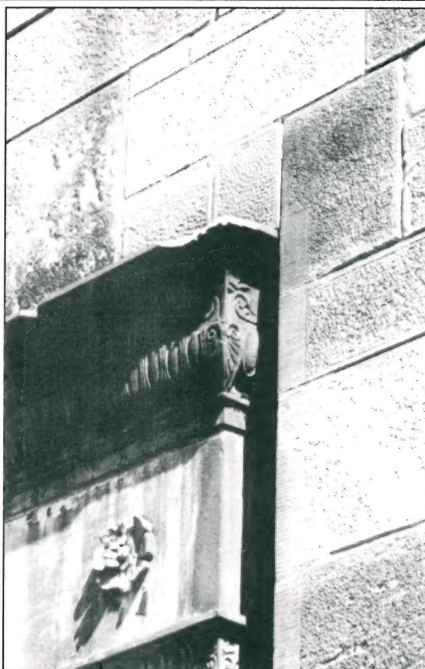
cially viable. We shall see. And we shall keep pressing for the solution which is in the best interests of Glasgow and Scotland: for Holmwood to be preserved in the public realm and opened to the public by the National Trust.

Meanwhile, early in February, we received a letter from Miller Samuel & Co., solicitors acting for Carvill (Scotland) Limited, which stated that their clients found the remarks about themselves made in our last *Newsletter* to be "injurious to their business" and "extremely objectionable and insulting." They demanded

“an immediate written apology” and our “proposals for compensation for the injury suffered.”

We did not offer any apology. Rather, in our reply, we denied that the remarks made in our *Newsletter* were in any way untrue, inaccurate or unsubstantiated, but that they were fair comment on a matter of public concern and about a building of international importance. As the developers had objected to our remark about “the deeply unimpressive record of the Carvill Group in dealing with sensitive sites”, we sent chapter and verse to their solicitors, mentioning the flats in Peel Street and Burgh Hall Street, Partick, (which involved the demolition of St Mary’s Church and Hall); the adjacent development of the grounds of the West of Scotland Cricket Club; and the proposed development in Glencairn Drive, Pollokshields (where the 1890-91 Pollokshields Glencairn Church went on fire in 1988 apparently after the site passed into Carvill’s ownership).

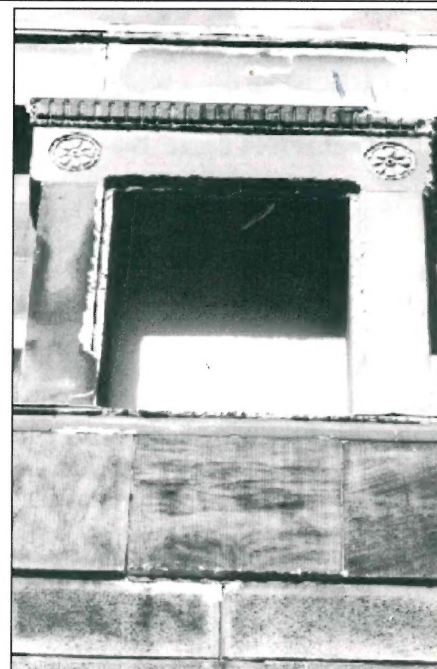
However, we offered to publish a letter from the developers if they still felt aggrieved as “it would clearly interest our members to know of development schemes carried out by Messrs Carvill of a quality and sensitivity such as might assuage the concern felt by all our members about their plans for Holmwood.” Since your Chairman sent this letter on 21st February, no communication has been received from either Miller Samuel & Company or Carvill (Scotland) Ltd.



ST VINCENT STREET CHURCH

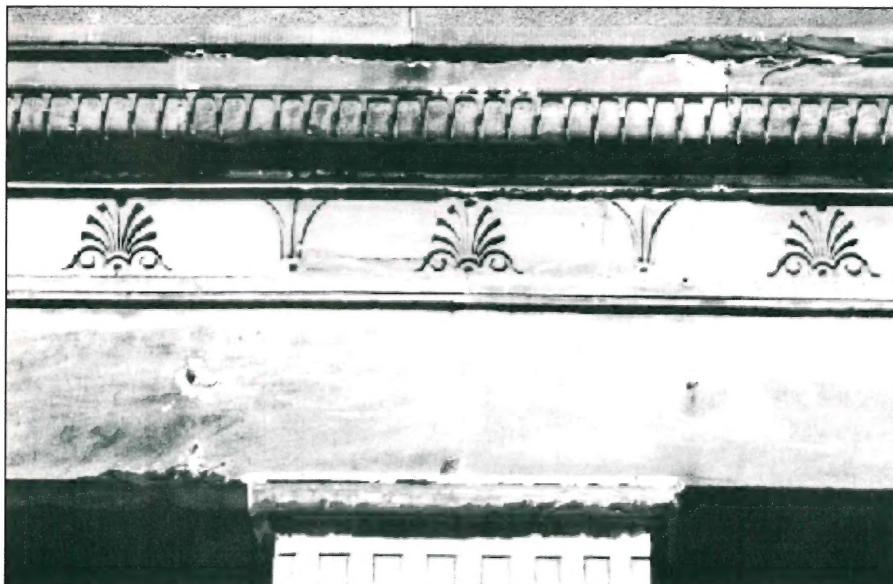
AT THE MEETING of the Property Review Team held in March, the new General Manager for Property & Environment of the Glasgow Development Agency created a renewed sense of optimism about the future of the church. We were pleased to find he is in accord with our view that it is inappropriate to offer the building on the open market for commercial use and that a new lease should be offered to the Free Church congregation that uses, and likes, the building.

A detailed dilapidations survey is being carried out by the Council, with a view to independent consultants taking the restoration project to tender stage. This, of course, we wel-



come. As regards the future use of the building, we continue to maintain that it can remain in use for worship—as the architect intended—while other activities can take place in the massive basement. The St Vincent Street Church, indeed, would make an admirable home for the Architecture Centre that Glasgow wants and needs. And, as Glasgow is making a strong bid to be chosen by the Arts Council under the Arts 2000 ‘1999 Year of Architecture and Design’ programme, this great Scottish monument cannot be allowed to remain in its present condition.

In view of this progress, it is genuinely distressing for us again to have had to complain about the treatment of the building by the Estates Department. But complain we must when Thomson’s only surviving complete church is being maltreated. After we objected to the barbaric coating of asphalt on the front walls and parapets, we were promised that future work would be carried out with Listed Building Consent and under the direction of a competent architect. But the vandalism continues. Lead has been placed at the bottom of the porticoes: a surely unnecessary waterproofing treatment which has involved, in places, cutting into the lower torus mouldings of the columns. Much worse, however, is the damage caused to the stonework of the Pitt Street entrance and in St Vincent Lane.

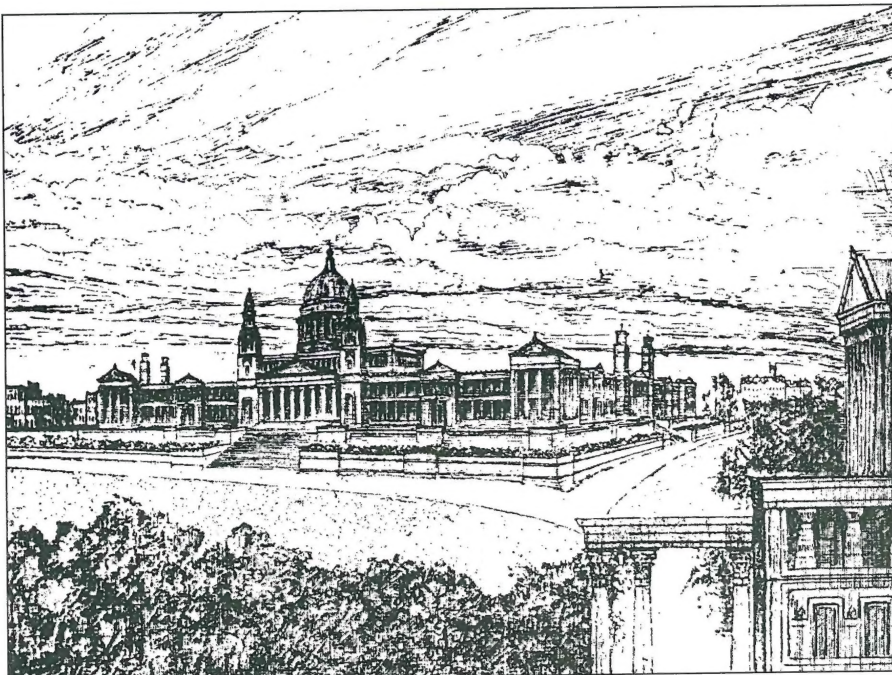


Continued on Page 4

WHO WAS WILLIAM POWER?

A CURIOSITY IN the Greek Thomson bibliography is a book of essays by William Power published in 1922 and entitled *The World Unvisited*. For this contains 'A Note on Greek Thomson' which, although full of errors, contains some useful insights: "Temperamentally, Thomson was a product of the Kippen Hills [sic] and of the Old Testament. He was Semitic Thomson before he was Greek Thomson. His Greek studies gave linear purity and a constructive centre to his composite dream of Attic, Egyptian, Assyrian, and Jewish architecture. His spiritual home was some neutral point equidistant from Athens, Luxor, Nineveh, and Jerusalem..."

The oddest part of Power's contribution to Thomson Studies is his illustration of "Glasgow University—as it might have been" for it shows a confused building with a central dome of a decadent Renaissance type which Thomson never used and surely would never have used. If Thomson had received the University commission, wrote Power, "whether it would have been the least like the composition which I have amateurishly essayed, no one can tell. But the roughest sketch, made under the influence of Greek Thomson, is bound to have some elements of



interest and even of beauty. My notion of what Glasgow University might have been is at all events many times better than what Glasgow University is. And even to have attempted to divine Thomson's conception of it is to realise the tragedy that denied to Glasgow's greatest architect the designing of Glasgow's greatest building."

Sadly, I must beg to differ. Thomson criticised Gilbert Scott's design on many levels but not for

omitting a large dome. Ironically, although a Goth, Scott would seem to have had more respect for such a decadent Roman invention than Thomson and he included a Gothic dome on his unexecuted design for the Berlin Reichstag—a form realised by F.W. Stevens on V.T. Station in Bombay. Much as I lament Thomson's exclusion by those treacherous, conventional dons, I think I would rather have Gilbert Scott on Gilmorehill than William Power.

Gavin Stamp

CASES

Continued from Page 3

As we have complained to Historic Scotland, the Director of Planning and the GDA, enclosing photographs clearly showing the damage caused in the last few months, the cornice of the wonderful entrance in Pitt Street has been chipped, possibly by a bucket being hoisted up or down. The damage caused in St Vincent Lane would seem to be the result of either malevolence or extraordinary stupidity.

The massive stones have been badly chipped, possibly by scaffolding poles, but the cornices of the square columns and the arrises of the archi-

traves and lintels of the windows above would seem to have been deliberately hacked away. This is vandalism of a high order on a building where every detail matters in a composition of immense intellectual sophistication.

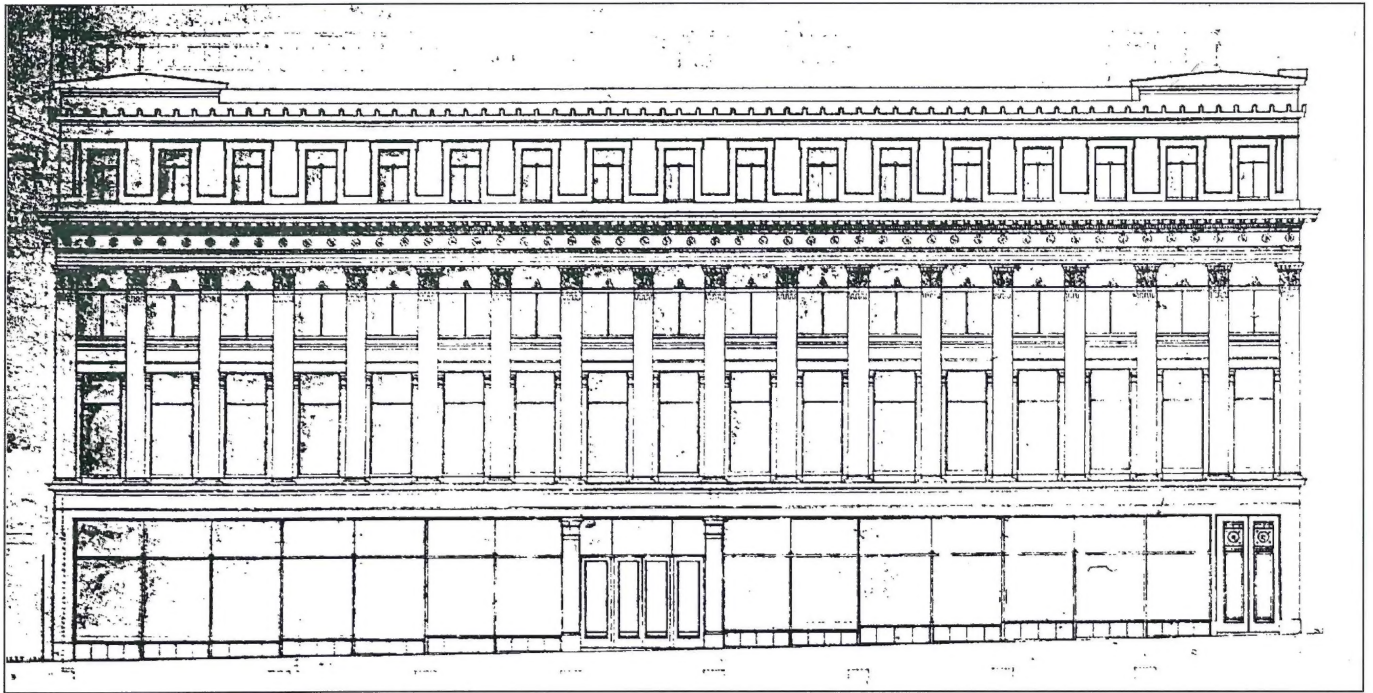
For the past two years the Estates Department have been carrying out repairs, but it now seems to us that the previous neglect would have been preferable to what is now happening to one of Glasgow's greatest works of architecture. What is intolerable is that, in the end, public money will have to be spent to repair damage carried out by vandals masquerading as workmen apparently acting under the orders of the Estates Department—whose wages come from public money.

338 ALBERT DRIVE, POLLOKSHIELDS

WE HAVE OBJECTED to the scale and inappropriate style of additions proposed for this half of what was originally a single villa. It was built in 1877 but Ronald McFadzean believes it was designed by Thomson but completed by his partner and successor, Turnbull.

What we have emphasised to the Council is that the character and scale of any additions cannot be regarded in isolation but only in relation to the appearance of the whole composition, that is, of 336-338 Albert Drive.

TURNBULL, AFTER ALL



THE BEAUTIFUL AND now sadly dilapidated warehouses in Watson Street and Bell Street just off the High Street have long intrigued admirers of Thomson.

A most direct and elegant adaptation of the Neo-Classical language to a commercial framed structure, they bear all his hallmarks yet seem to have been built after his death as part of the Glasgow City Improvement scheme. Also, if they were designed by Thomson shortly before his death, the design seems to be a throwback to the 1860s, to the Dunlop Street warehouse in particular.

Now we know the answer. While searching for plans which might illuminate the history of the Ballater Street Church among the railway archives kept in West Register House in Edinburgh, your Chairman came across a card index reference to document RHP 14756: plans for warehouses in 'Watson Street, Graeme Street and McPherson Street'. This is a single sheet which, sure enough, depicts the elevations of the Thomsonesque buildings in Watson Street and Bell Street almost as built. Inscribed 'For Gavin Bell Millar Esqre', the drawing is dated Nov. 1876—after Thomson's death. No architect's name is given, but the address—122 Wellington Street—is

that of Thomson and Turnbull.

The design, therefore, must surely be by Robert Turnbull who made a career of recycling Thomson's details after the death of his partner in March 1875. However, there remains a remote possibility that the design might be by Thomson as the paper bears an 1873 watermark.

The rebuilding of this area had been delayed and the new street plan by Carrick, the City Architect, altered because of the intervention of the City of Glasgow Union Railway and some of the land was developed by the Glasgow & South Western Railway Company. The whole complicated story of Thomson's involvement in the Glasgow Improvement Scheme and the building of the

Watson Street warehouses will be given in the contribution by Brian Edwards in the book of essays on Thomson being edited by Gavin Stamp and Sam McKinstry for publication by Edinburgh University Press next year.

Of course, whether the design is by Thomson, Turnbull or anybody else is not the main issue. What really matters is that these dilapidated warehouses are beautiful and, now that the massive bonded whisky railway warehouses on the north side of Bell Street have been rehabilitated for a new use, they ought to be restored as part of the re-invigoration of Glasgow Cross and this dismal part of the High Street. They are too much of an asset for Glasgow to lose.

It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a Hereford?

SEVERAL MEMBERS responded to our question about the car in the photograph of the now-demolished Busby House (*Newsletter* No 6).

Stuart Evans suggested a 1940s or 1950s A70 Hampshire or A40 Somerset converted to an estate car or with a specialist coach-built body. The favourite choice, however, as proposed by Alex J. Rannie and several others described it as an Austin Hereford, either a Countryman or a specialist conversion.



THE BALLATER STREET CHURCH

THOMSON, AS Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote, designed "three of the finest Romantic Classical churches in the world." But, as Glaswegians know, he actually designed four churches in the city and the chapel in the Gorbals that went on fire in 1971 was one of his most intriguing designs. Various known as the Chalmers Free Church, the Govan Street Free Church, the Cunningham Free Church and, in its last sad days, as the premises of Daniel Montgomery & Son, Bottle Closure Manufacturers, the building seemed to bear an astonishing resemblance to Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple at Oak Park.

To judge by the surviving photographs, this little building—which was never properly recorded—seemed to bear out Andy MacMillan's compelling argument that Wright knew about Thomson. But how? The Double Villa and Holmwood were published, but never the Ballater Street Church. Mythmaker and inveterate liar as Wright was, it is highly unlikely that he could have slipped across the Atlantic to visit Glasgow

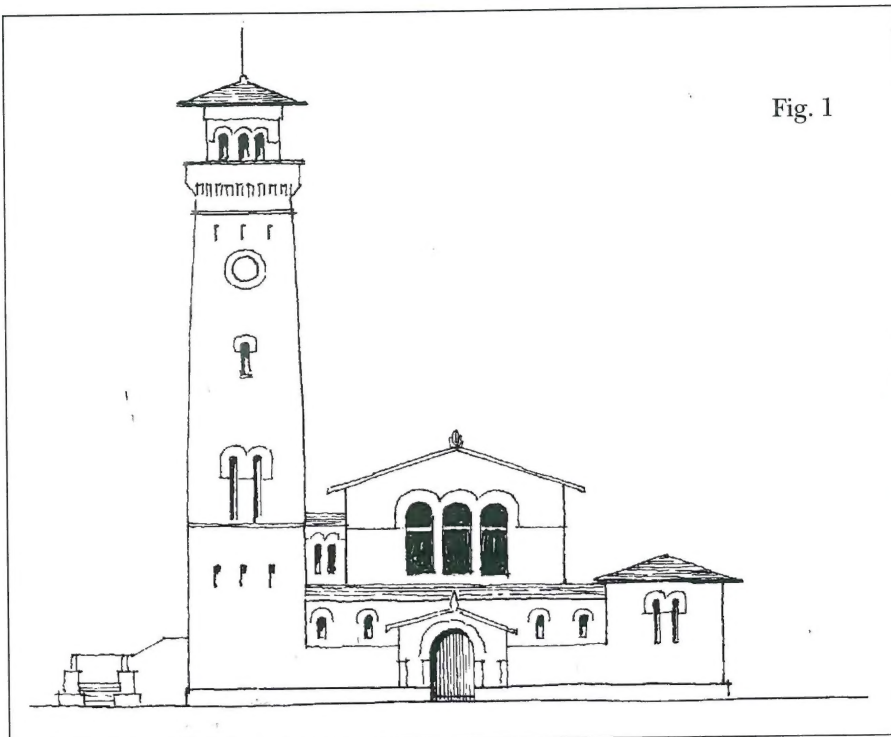


Fig. 1

unnoticed before designing Unity Temple in 1906.

Investigations continue. Meanwhile we are very glad that Ronald McFadzean is using our *Newsletter* to expand and correct the accounts of Thomson's buildings given in his

now standard and indispensable biography. His reconstruction of the plan of the Ballater Street Church makes the comparison with Unity Temple all the more interesting.

SOME ASPECTS OF MORAY TERRACE AND THE BALLATER STREET CHURCH

IN THE 1950s and '60s the best source of information on the buildings of Glasgow was Alfred G. Lohead, a retired architect in his late 70s or early 80s. As a hobby he had spent many years recording the architecture of the city and had formulated a lot of ideas and opinions which, at the time, appeared to be accurate. I know now that he could be wrong on occasion and I, in my haste to gather information on Thomson's buildings before they were demolished, should have found time to verify his ideas. I had a great liking and respect for Mr Lohead and in no way am I attempting to

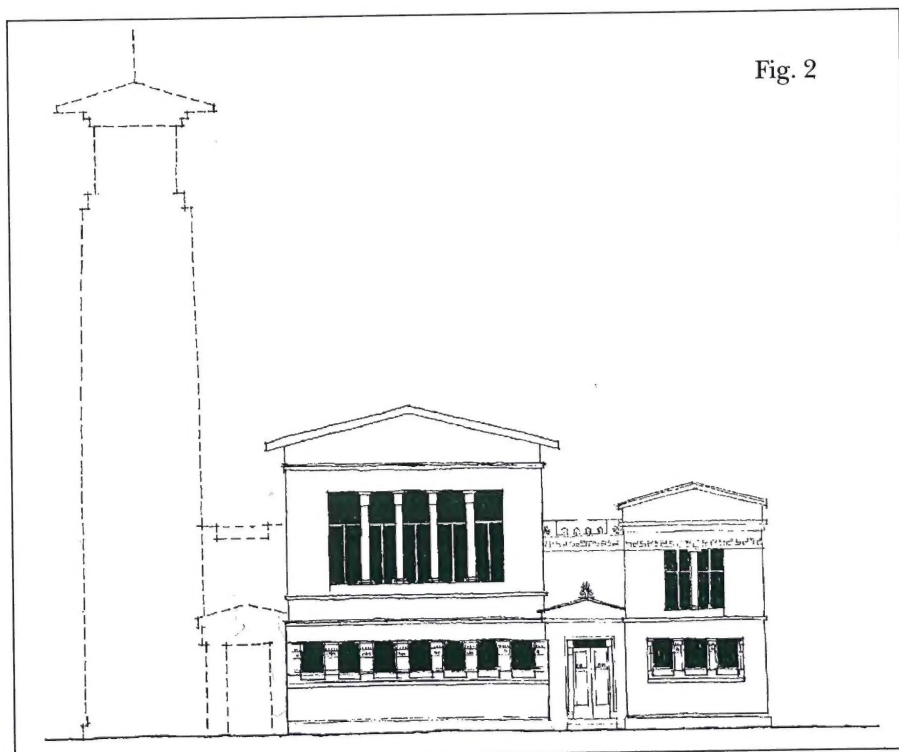


Fig. 2



*Above: Ballater Street Church in 1971.
Photo: Ronald McFadzean*

denigrate his work. The mistakes are mine and mine alone.

Two examples of this are Moray Terrace and the Ballater Street Church—originally called Cunningham Free Church.

At Moray Terrace I understood that the front gardens originally extended to Darnley Road and when the railway was constructed they were cut back to their present position. This explained the unpleasant proximity of the terrace to the railway. So I thought.

However, in March 1990 I received a most interesting letter from Mike Greenwood of Strathbungo Conservation informing me that the railway was constructed eleven years before the terrace. For the next few days I hid myself from sight and hoped that I had imagined it all. But it was not to be. Mr Greenwood had also provided proof and I had to face reality. Why Thomson chose a site (I understand that the terrace was a speculative venture by Thomson, McIntyre a building contractor, and Stevenson a brick manufacturer) so close to an existing railway with all its smoke and noise and, in addition, a site facing north which would not show his building off to advantage, remains a mystery.

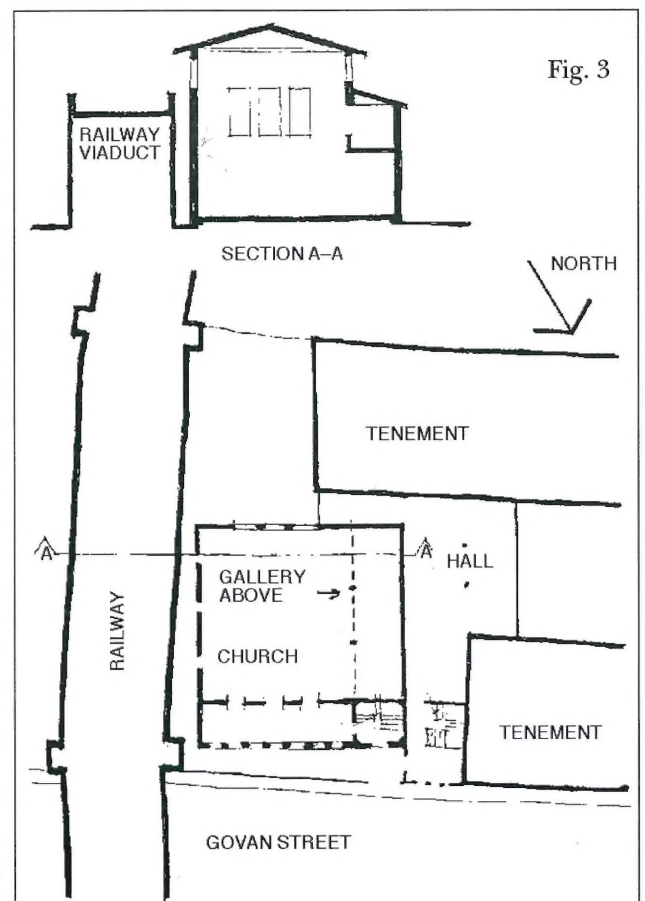
Mr Greenwood's information also prompted me to reconsider the ori-

gin of the Cunningham Free Church in Ballater Street. Alfred Lohead had given some thought to this remarkable building and I remember him sketching out his idea that the church might have been a development of the unidentified Romanesque church shown on a drawing in the Thomson collection in the Mitchell Library.

The front elevation of this design (Fig. 1) had some slight similarity to the Ballater Street Church, but without the tower. Mr Lohead believed that the railway had been constructed after the church and that part of the building might have been demolished. He wondered if a tower had formed part of the original scheme (Fig. 2). He was well aware that it was conjecture and that he had no evidence of a tower ever being attached to the church.

Once again, Mike Greenwood came to my aid with most

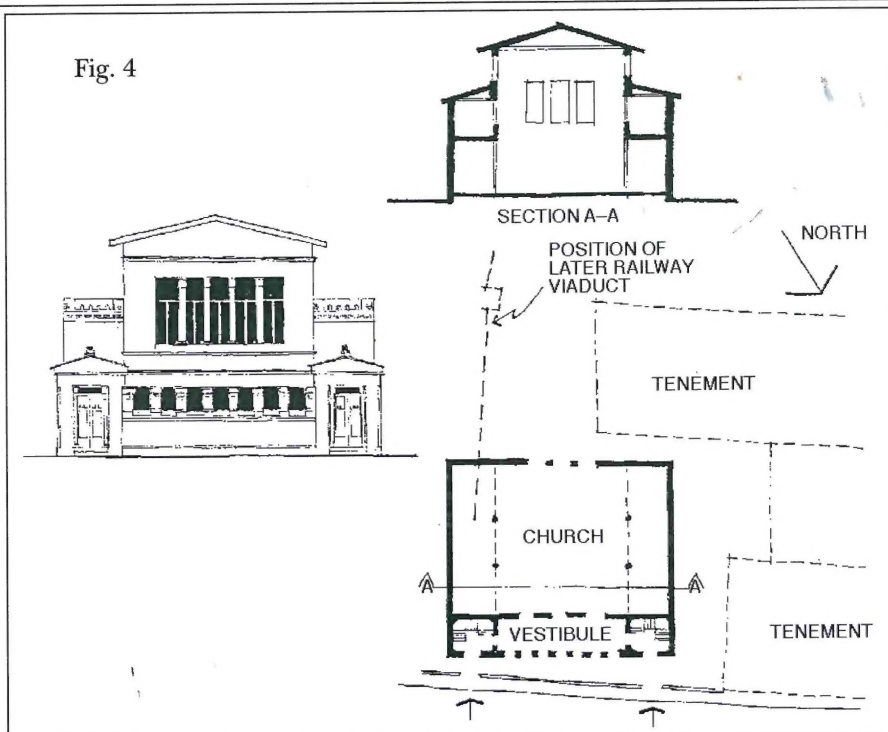
helpful information. The railway was authorised in 1864 and opened in 1870. The church is dated to 1859 so Mr Lohead was right after all. But had any of the church been demolished? The various title deed plans I



have seen gave no help but did yield some interesting additional data. On a plan dated May 1898 there is a wall pierced by two openings on the north boundary facing Govan Street (Now Ballater Street). This has long vanished but may have been part of Thomson's original design. On a plan dated 26 January 1897 this wall again appears and it is also shown clearly on the O.S. 1:500 scale map for 1896.

On the later title plans there is a curious step back in the east wall of the church. From Mike Greenwood I understand that this wall was rebuilt about 1896, but I was unclear as to the reason. He also drew my attention to Thomas Sulman's panoramic view of Glasgow 1864 which shows the church prior to construction of the railway. There is no tower. This appeared to end the matter, but I still wondered if anything had been demolished to make way for the railway.

On Tuesday, 24 March 1971 the church, which had been used for a long time as a factory, was destroyed by fire. Two days later I visited the site and found workmen demolishing the front facade and west side of the nave. I was allowed to enter the



ruins and spent a couple of hours trying to sketch the layout of the building. At this time I was still under the impression that a large portion of the east side of the original church had been demolished for the railway and this probably distorted my thinking.

The interior of the building was a dangerously tangled mess of charred timber beams and rubble open to the sky, but I was able to make sufficient notes and sketches to reconstruct the plan and section of the church but not the adjacent hall (Fig 3). I had hoped to obtain more information but the sudden collapse of part of the roof brought matters to an undignified and dusty close.

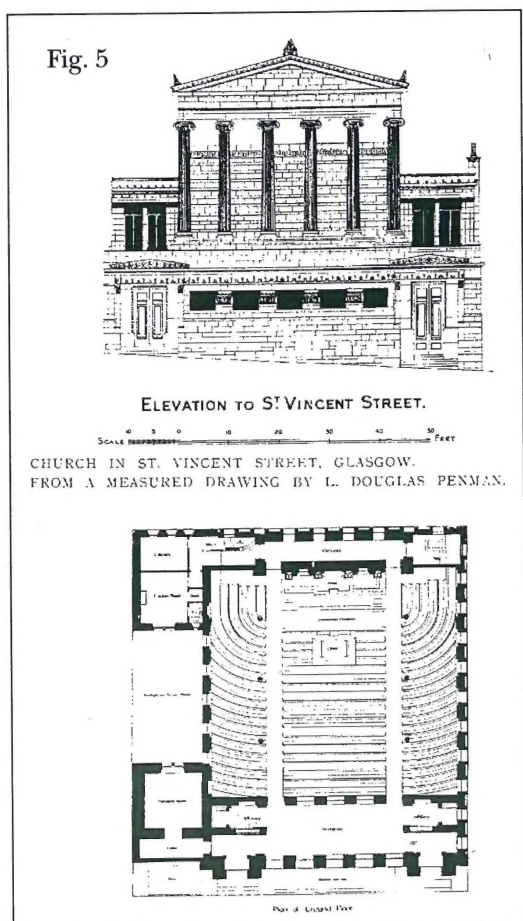
My notes indicate that the church building was constructed of large rectangular ashlar sandstone blocks to the front facade with Wilson's bricks to side and rear walls. There were 5" diameter cast-iron columns with small cast-iron floral capitals supporting the gallery and clearstorey. There were patera motifs on the main beam above the gallery—i.e. under the clearstorey. This clearstorey and its partner along the top of the east wall were most interesting as, unexpectedly, they had been constructed entirely of timber. There had been a timber and

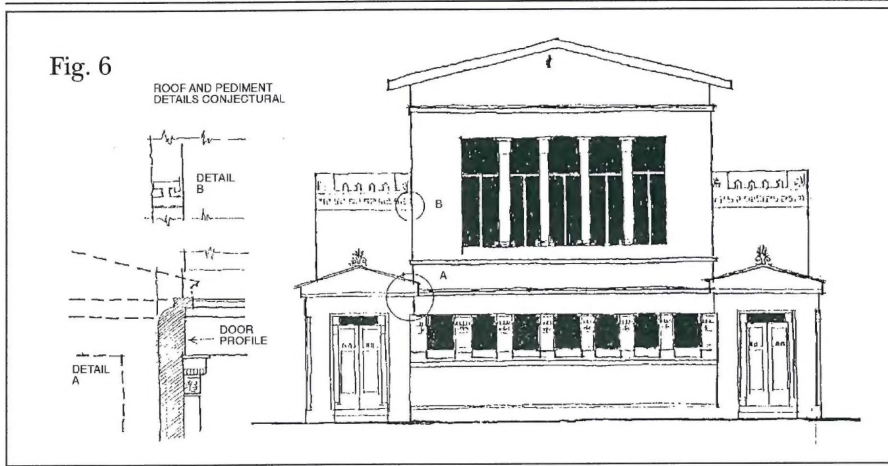
slate roof with wide overhanging eaves supported on cast iron brackets.

Internally, the walls had been lined with yellow pine vertical 'V'-jointed boarding finished with a clear varnish and stencilled decorations. A pseudo-Greek idiom had been adopted for the cast iron railings to the staircase. At the front gable the upper five windows were clear of the stone columns and formed a detached timber screen. The range of windows at ground floor level had 1/4" obscured plate glass.

The decoration over the main entrance to the church was slightly different from that on the adjacent hall entrance and clearly indicated that the hall was a later addition. The Hall staircase did not have balusters but a solid brick or masonry wall on the stair well side. The tenement on the west side of the Hall had been built at a later date so the upper gable partially rested on the outer wall of the Hall.

Looking at my photographs of the wrecked building I remember that I assumed that the rather abrupt termination of the main facade at the north east corner was caused by a partial demolition of the building. I realise now that there was an earlier building (clearly shown on the 1857-published 1861-O.S. map) where the railway now stands and that the church may have been built hard against it. However, like a dog that





won't let go of its bone I was still not completely convinced that we had the whole story concerning the east side of the church.

The curious plan and section with their asymmetrical arrangement do not make any sense architecturally. When viewed, even in its wrecked state, the interior of the east wall provided a daunting cliff of solid wall surmounted by the horizontal clear-storey. The proportions were very strange indeed but if there had been originally an aisle and gallery along that side to mirror those on the west side all would have been well. I thought that the plan and main elevation of the church should have looked something like my sketches

(Fig. 4). The similarity to the almost contemporary plan and north elevation of the St. Vincent Church is obvious (Fig. 5).

Looking for confirmation of these ideas I recently re-examined my photographs of the north-east corner and to my surprise I noticed an outline on the stonework which followed exactly the profile of the edge of the west doorway. Further up the wall there is a faint image of the incised fret decoration which occurs at the same level over the west entrance (Fig. 6). There could be no reason for these details unless they were the remains of a demolished east entrance. Finally on the 1896 Feu plan the width of the church is

approximately 55 feet but on the 1910, 1:1250 O.S. Map it has been reduced to about 45 feet. If there had been an eastern aisle it would have measured approximately 10–12 feet.

Consequently, I am convinced that an east aisle and gallery once existed and may have been demolished about 1896–7. Furthermore, Mike Greenwood informed me that 'This is also the date when the Glasgow and S.W. Act authorised the widening alteration and deviation of the existing railway and it was for this purpose that the church was acquired.... It is probably at this time, circa 1896, that the church became a factory.'

It is a matter of regret that I did not have longer to examine the ruins of the church and the adjoining hall. I do not know of the existence of any drawings or additional photographs but some must, surely, have survived. I hope that this short account might jog the memory of somebody somewhere and additional information will be forthcoming to establish the true extent of Thomson's design.

In conclusion, any new mistakes are, I assure you, still all my own!

CHAIRMAN'S POSTSCRIPT

INCREASINGLY TANTALISED by photographs of the Ballater Street Church, I recently attempted to find out more myself by looking for early maps. What was most frustrating is that the first, 1861 edition (surveyed in 1857) of the 1:500 Ordnance Survey—a wonderful thing which gives the ground plans of churches and public buildings—was just too early: the site of the church is cleared and empty. This, however, does reveal that the site was approximately square. When the second, and, alas, last, 1:500 Ordnance map (surveyed in 1894) was published in 1896, the City of Glasgow Union Railway from Pollokshields to St Enoch had already cut through.

But I did not believe that the building of this line in the late 1860s had swept away anything of the church—a supposition confirmed by Dr McFadzean's latest research and con-



temporary railway maps. This is also shown by the 1:500 plans prepared in 1866 for the City Improvement Scheme [Strathclyde Regional Archives: A/3/43] which shows that the authorised line of the railway just

Fig 1. 1857. Ordnance Survey 1:500.

missed property number 39, an almost perfect square which must have been Thomson's church. What, of course, I had not grasped is what

Dr McFadzean now clinchingly and conclusively reveals—that the railway viaduct had been widened from two tracks to four in 1896-97 and it was then that the eastern aisle was taken down. What, however, remains puzzling is that a comparison between the 1866 Improvement map and the 1894 Ordnance Survey suggests that the church drew a little to the east, to meet the original railway viaduct. This could be due to imprecise draughtsmanship or the church building on the sliver of land cleared by building the railway.

A last point concerns the Church Hall to the west which so contributed to that tantalising resemblance to Wright's Unity Temple. Dr McFadzean and Andy MacMillan both recall that the Hall seemed to be a later addition and the 1857 and 1866 maps suggests that the site did not originally allow for this hall. Furthermore, the 1894 Ordnance Survey shows that the hall followed a slightly different street alignment to the main facade of the church. The answer, I think, is that Govan Street (later Ballater Street) was a dead-end when the church was built and was only extended westwards to Gorbals Cross in c.1872 under Robert Carrick's City Improvement Scheme. The extended street followed a slightly different alignment—as indicated on the 1866 Improvements map—and it was on land cleared and freed in this operation that the church hall was built. If, as seems likely, the hall was added in about 1872, it was surely Thomson himself who designed the addition to his fascinating little Free Church in the Gorbals.

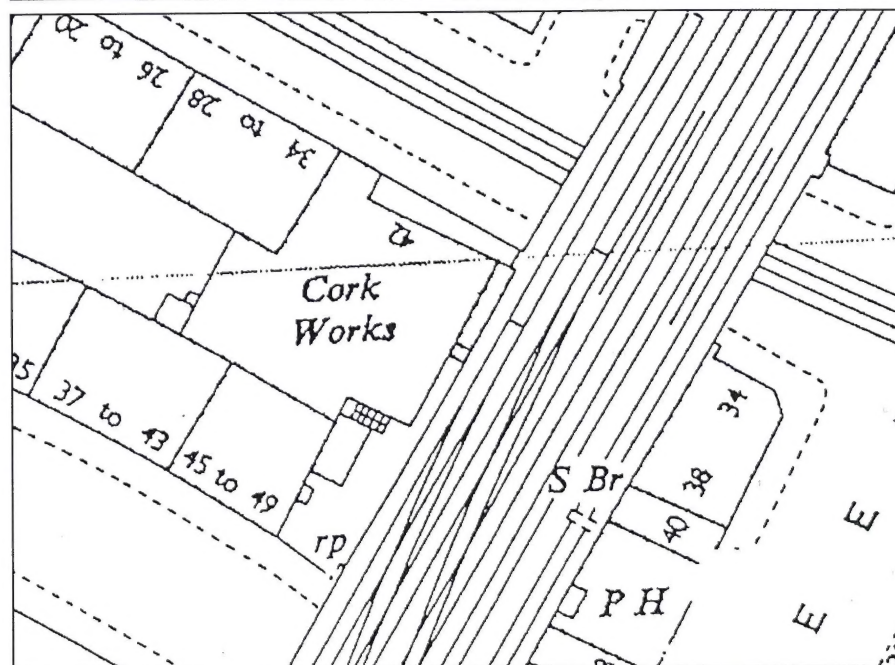
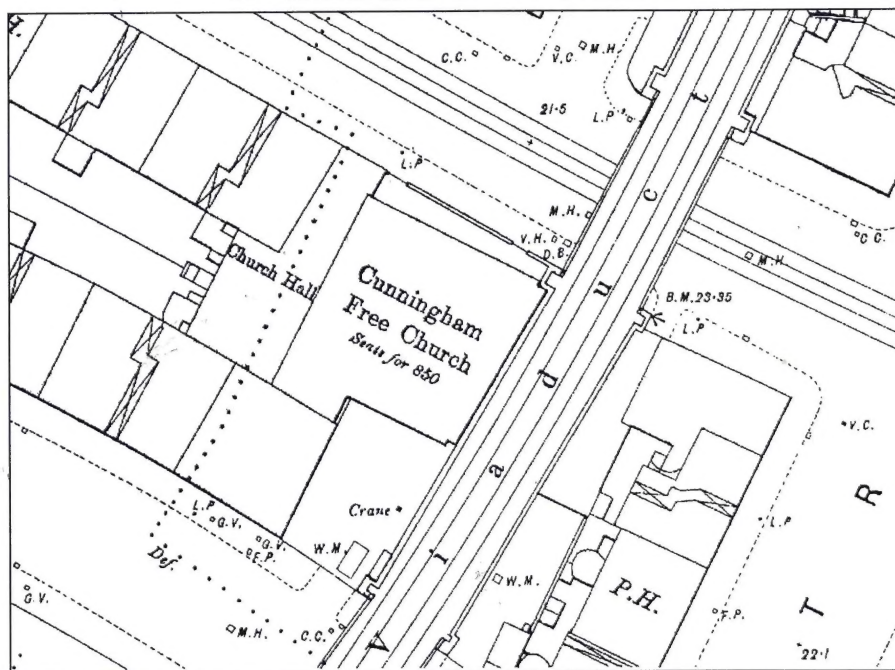


Fig 2. 1866 City Improvement Scheme 1:500.

Fig 3. 1894 Ordnance Survey 1:500.

Fig 4. 1910 Ordnance Survey 1:1250 enlarged to same scale.

Queen's Park Church

THURSDAY, 25TH MARCH marked the 50th anniversary of the destruction of Queen's Park Church, the third of Alexander Thomson's major Glasgow churches. Thomas Howarth, an architect now resident in Canada, recalls the night.

On the night of the first air raid on Clydebank my wife and I dined with the William Davidsons who were still living at N° 78 Southpark Avenue, Glasgow, the former home of Charles and Margaret Mackintosh. We left early and, as we paused at the gate to enjoy the pitch-black, starlit night, we heard the sinister, unmistakable throb of a German pathfinder aircraft overhead.

We made our way in the blackout to the Garnethill tram terminal and rode home to Shawlands. By the time we arrived the sky over Clydebank was glowing red, punctuated by streams of tracer shells, and accompanied by the thud, thud, thud of explosions.

We moved our mattresses from the bedroom to the central hallway of our four-storey, tenement apartment—there were no air-raid shelters available and we lived on the top floor. This arrangement provided but a flimsy protection from flying glass, and all we had above us was the traditional wooden, slated roof. But for the lack of better protection we slept there during air raids.

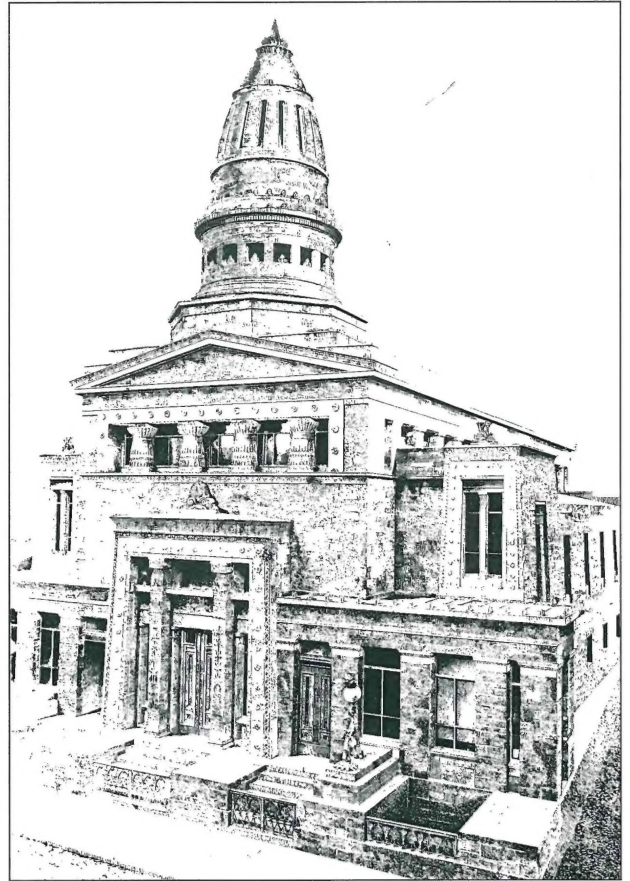
The night Queen's Park Church was destroyed we were awakened by the familiar call of the sirens. Later as the German planes were returning from Clydebank, they flew very low over us, desperately seeking to escape, presumably from our night-fighters. The frantic roar of engines at full throttle was unforgettable, and as they passed there was an extraordinary clatter as though all our slates were lifted in the suction created by their extremely low passage, and then fell back with a xylophonic cacophony. In retrospect it may have been the noise of falling shrapnel—but I don't think so.

The Germans jettisoned their incendiaries half-a-mile or so beyond us and Alexander Thomson's masterpiece was destroyed.

My recollection of the church itself is sketchy. I had arrived in Glasgow in the late summer of 1939 to take up my first teaching appointment at the School of Architecture, then housed in the Royal Technical College, George Street, and had not yet had time to adjust to my new environment. I visited the church only once, but retain a vivid recollection of its logical plan form and spatial concept. It was the ideal solution, it seemed to me, of the preaching and singing church with central pulpit, organ and choir carefully related to the disposition of the congregation. I stood in the pulpit and

was impressed by the intimacy the architect had achieved between congregation and speaker—a rare quality that reminded me of St John's Methodist Church, Sauchiehall Street, now regrettably demolished, where I played the organ for mid-week services.

I was greatly impressed by Thomson's unorthodox use of colour and detail, in great contrast, of course, to those of Charles Rennie Mackintosh at Queen's Cross Church and elsewhere, with which I was familiarising myself at that time. My first lecture on Mackintosh, incidentally, was



given in Glasgow in February, 1940!

As I pursued my research on the Glasgow movement I became aware of the lack of information on Thomson, but my international studies and professional interests led me away from the Glasgow scene. It was with great delight, therefore, that I met Gavin Stamp in 1990, heard him lecture and accepted his invitation to join the Alexander Thomson Society. It seemed that history was repeating itself in an extraordinary way, fifty years later 1940 CRM, 1990 Thomson.

Thomas Howarth, Toronto, Canada

Requiem for a Church

OVER FIFTY MEMBERS attended 'A Requiem for a Church', organised by the Society to commemorate the destruction of Queen's Park Church. Dominic d'Angelo gave an illustrated lecture on the history of the building and the story of that fateful night in 1943. An abbreviated version of the lecture will appear in a later *Newsletter*.

The event, held in the Double Villa home of Pippy and Jim McEwen, Langside, allowed visitors to view half of one of Thomson's more intimate interiors. Music was selected and performed by Guy Hamilton, former Music Director of The Scottish Ballet, while the excellent catering was provided by Pippy McEwen and Fratelli Sarti.

FORTHCOMING EVENT

Thursday, 17th June

Visits to the interiors of Great Western Terrace

LAST YEAR we visited the magnificent but much-abused interior of N° 4 Great Western Terrace, now owned by the City Council following compulsory purchase. Now, thanks for the kindness of Dr Donald Barran, a resident of Great Western Terrace and a member of the society, we are able to see inside several more of the houses in Thomson's most magnificent terrace.

Please assemble at N° 3 Great Western Terrace at 6.00 p.m. on Thursday, June 17th.

Charitable Status Granted

THE ALEXANDER Thomson Society is now registered as a society for charitable purposes with the Inland Revenue. This means that we can now obtain tax relief on all the income we generate, providing it's for the purpose of furthering our constitutional aims, and should enable us to make even better use of the funds available to us. This is particularly important as the Society develops its range of activities to promote Thomson and his work. Our registration number is SC021447.

The Alexander Thomson Society Committee

Chairman: Gavin Stamp

Hon. Secretary: Dominic d'Angelo

Hon. Treasurer: Sam McKinstry

Hon. Minutes Secretary:
Veronica Wright

Committee: Mark Baines, Roger Emmerson, Roger Guthrie, John McAslan, Pippy McEwen, Alexander Stoddart.

Our Patrons are the Marquess of Bute, Professor Andor Gomme and Professor Andrew MacMillan.

THE ALEXANDER THOMSON MEDALLION

WITH THIS *Newsletter* comes a leaflet and order form for something no owner or occupier of a Thomson building can possibly do without and which members of this society will surely wish to have.

Those who saw the exhibition in the St Vincent Street Church at the 'Buildings at Risk' evening last November will have admired the portrait medallion of Thomson executed by Alexander Stoddart, the young Paisley Neo-Classical sculptor. Sandy has now added appropriate lettering to this beautiful object and Neil

Baxter Associates are putting it into production as a limited edition.

Sandy Stoddart's medallion nicely expresses his reverence for two of the greatest Neo-Classical artists of the 19th century: Bertel Thorvaldsen and Alexander Thomson. Sandy is, of course, a member of our Committee and he has added to our understanding of Thomson by writing about the architect's association with the sculptor John Mossman for the book of essays on Thomson to be published next year.

LETTER

Back at Arranview...

I found Sam McKinstry's article in the January Newsletter very intriguing, but not wholly convincing as printed.

He may well have evidence that Motherwell was the client for whom the house was built, though it seems a remarkably extensive (and expensive) house to have been erected for a solicitor who had only recently finished his studies in 1868.

More important, however, is the question of the architect. Dr McKinstry shows that many details of Arranview have precedents in Alexander Thomson's work, but overlooks that its massing is entirely different. Thomson's own articulation of masses was clear-cut to the point of brutalism. Arranview, however, is conceived surely by an architect in the picturesque tradition, who wished to give the impression that it had grown piecemeal. There are none of Thomson's emphatic horizontal accents. I find it hard to believe he would have countenanced the half-hearted projection of the ground-floor window on the left of the illustration, or the clumsy collision of two similar roof pitches on the extreme right.

Could not the article on the house in Adelaide provide a possible clue?

1968 was the year in which illustrations of two of Thomson's finest houses were published; is it not possible that the client (whether Motherwell or another) instructed his architect to build a house like them, but on a larger scale?

Commissions of this size were not to be sniffed at, and I suspect any architect, however high-principled, would have done his best to comply. If a draughtsman in the office had been told to mug up on Alexander Thomson and revise the plans accordingly, he might well have produced Arranview.

Or is this just the sort of misconception that might be expected of a Sassenach without architectural training?

John Godden, Hertford

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The Alexander Thomson Medallion



In 1992 the Glasgow Institute of Architects and the Alexander Thomson Society commissioned Alexander Stoddart to produce a relief portrait of one of Glasgow's most famous architect sons – Alexander Thomson. The medallion featured in the exhibition *Alexander 'Greek' Thomson – Buildings at Risk*. It has now been reproduced, cast full scale in a signed limited edition of 300. At the artist's request the cost of the Medallion is set deliberately low (about the price of a limited edition contemporary print) to enable purchase by those with a genuine interest in Thomson and his work rather than solely by museums and specialist investors. A contribution of 10% of the nett purchase price will go to the Alexander Thomson Society.

The Architect

Alexander Thomson (1817-75) lived and worked in Glasgow and was in practice from the late 1840s. The greatest influence on his work was the great Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Thomson's monumental terraces and what remains of his church designs (the shell of Caledonian Road and the damaged St Vincent Street) are a legacy of immense importance in Glasgow and held in high esteem throughout Europe.

The Artist

Alexander Stoddart (b. 1959) lives and works in Paisley. His statuary in a pure, neo-classical style adorns a number of important Glasgow buildings, most notably the Italian Centre (Page and Park Architects 1990). Stoddart's work is included in Glasgow's municipal collection and he is currently undertaking a project for the Scottish National Galleries. His art and theory have been the subject of numerous critical examinations and articles, most notably Scottish Television's *NB* special "Alexander The Great?"

The Object

The Thomson Medallion is a large piece of work. Measuring 17" in diameter and 4.5" deep it weighs 16lbs. It is cast in a particularly hard and durable plaster, "Herculite". It is inscribed with the names of the architect and the artist. Each of the edition of 300 will be signed and numbered on the verso by Alexander Stoddart and will be accompanied by a certificate and hanging instructions.

Illustration is approximately 30% actual size

The Thomson Medallion will be sold strictly on a first come, first served basis

All bookings and enquiries to Neil Baxter Associates, 21 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow G3 7XH. Tel: 041-331 2668, Fax: 041-332 8784

Booking Form (maximum two medallions per purchaser)

PLEASE PRINT

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

I enclose a cheque/postal order for **£141** per item (£120 + VAT) made payable to "Neil Baxter Associates"

I will call to collect ☐

I wish special delivery and enclose a further £23.50 (£20 + VAT) – Glasgow area ☐

or £47.00 (£40 + VAT) – rest of UK ☐

Please tear off and remit (with payment) to: Neil Baxter Associates, 21 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow G3 7XH